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TAGS: [OREP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [CS](#)
SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR CODEL COSTELLO

REF: STATE 19699

¶1. Embassy San Jose is pleased to grant country clearance to the Congressional Delegation led by Congressman Jerry F. Costello. The other members of the delegation are: Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR); Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-FL); Rep. Henry E. Brown (R-SC); Rep. Michael Capuano (D-MA); Rep. Mazie Hirono (D-HI); Mr. Nick Sabatini, Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, FAA and Ms. Janice McKinney, Asst. Director, Office of Interparliamentary Affairs; Committee Staff includes: David Heymsfeld, Jimmy Miller, Stacie Soumbeniotis, Holly Woodruff Lyons and Christa Fornarotto; Army escorts to include: Major Jeremy Glauber, Dr. Deborah Omori, Sgt. Will Reinhart, and Sgt. Hermann Thomas who will be in Costa Rica from March 1-4, 2008. The purpose of this visit is to inspect commercial aviation maintenance facilities in Costa Rica and confer with relevant GOCR officials.

¶2. Control Officer: Robert B. Andrew, office (506) 519-2253, cell (506) 824-0955 and Mark E. Kissel, office (506) 519-2273, cell (506) 838-7531. The Embassy after-hours emergency phone number is (506) 220-3127.

¶3. Accommodations: Travelers will be staying at the Hotel Real Intercontinental. The per diem rate for San Jose is \$118.00 for lodging, and \$78.00 M&IE.

¶4. Transportation: CODEL will be provided transportation. The following is the standard guidance re use of public transportation.

The only taxis available at the airport are the Taxi Aeropuerto orange taxis found inside the arrival hall. Tickets for the orange taxis are sold at a ticket booth located immediately inside the arrival hall exit doors. Fares (payable in U.S. dollars or local currency) vary according to destination but the cost of a standard orange taxi ticket to the Embassy is \$12, to the Intercontinental Hotel is \$14 and to downtown San Jose is \$12. Vans are also available at increased cost. If you miss the ticket counter or otherwise need assistance with orange taxi service, the company has an individual posted curbside from where the orange taxis are dispatched. Taxi Aeropuerto also offers pick-up service and transportation to the airport for departing passengers. Reservations can be made 24 hours a day by phoning (506) 221-6865.

Elsewhere in San Jose, official taxis are considered safe when using standard security precautions. Official taxis have a yellow triangle on the door, an identification number, a taxi light on the roof of the car, and generally have working meters. Ask if the meter is functioning before entering the cab. If the meter is not functioning, the cost of the fares should be negotiated prior to entering the cab. Official taxis are also easily obtainable from hotels.

Unofficial taxis come in all shapes and sizes and should be avoided.

¶5. Public Affairs: The Embassy Public Affairs Office

(506-519-2287) is the Embassy's designated point of contact with the press and will handle any media issues in coordination with CODEL.

16. Travel documents/Threat assessment/Local conditions: All official visitors must travel with passports, preferably official or diplomatic. Without a valid passport, a visitor lacks official status in the eyes of the Costa Rican Government. However, no repeat no visa is necessary.

Important - Please note: The Costa Rican government recently instituted a requirement that persons traveling to Costa Rica from certain countries in South America and Sub-Sahara Africa must have a valid yellow fever vaccination. Those affected South American countries are: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana and Venezuela. Please refer to our Embassy Internet website for more information at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/cs/>.

Dengue fever is present throughout Costa Rica, as is it in most of Central America. Dengue is a severe, flu-like illness spread by day-biting mosquitoes. There have been many cases in San Jose, but most occur in the warmer lower-lying areas of the country because more mosquitoes are found there. There is no vaccination for dengue. Treatment is limited to reducing discomfort. It is strongly recommended that insect repellents containing DEET be used, long pants and long sleeve shirts be worn, as well as protection by window and door screens.

During this time of heightened security alerts, all travelers should consult the Department's website for the latest public announcements or other safety notices at www.travel.state.gov or <http://sanjose.usembassy.gov/uscitizen.html>.

Costa Rica is currently rated as a "high" crime threat post. The increasing use of violence during the commission of a street crime is a threat to all visitors. Travelers are urged to exercise caution, as in any large city. Local law enforcement agencies do not act according to U.S. standards and have limited capabilities. Jewelry should not be worn on the streets. Large amounts of cash should not be displayed. The downtown area of San Jose should be avoided at night because of the increase of criminal activity that occurs in this area.

Credit card fraud and credit card "number skimming" is a rapidly growing crime. Visitors should avoid using debit cards for point-of-sale purchases, as a skimmed number can be used to clean out an account. Visitors should check their credit card accounts frequently.

Visitors are advised to avoid unofficial moneychangers who may offer better rates but who often trade in counterfeit currency. The present rate of exchange is approximately 493 Costa Rican colones to one dollar. Accommodation exchange is available at a comparable rate at the airport.

Visitors should exercise caution if they will be driving in Costa Rica. The combination of poor road conditions, erratic driving, and pedestrian and animal traffic make driving very treacherous. Costa Rica has one of the highest accident rates per automobiles in the world. The Embassy strongly recommends against driving outside of the San Jose area at night.

Vehicles should not be left unattended or packages left visible inside them.

Costa Rica is an earthquake zone and periodically experiences significant tremors.

Visitors should be careful not to eat peanuts or products made from peanuts grown in Costa Rica because they may harbor aflatoxin, which is suspected in the causation of liver cancer.

17. Personal Computers: Please be advised that State Department regulations prohibit installation or use of privately-owned computers in any State Department building. Visitors must notify the Regional Security Office in advance if they intend to use U.S. Government-owned portable computers in the Chancery.

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